DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 161 189 EC 112 317

AUTHOR Davis, E. Dale
TITLE Promising Practices in Mainstreaming for the Secondary School Principal.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Problems; *Administrator Attitudes; *Handicapped Children; *Mainstreaming; *Principals; Research Projects; Supervisory Methods

ABSTRACT

A study to determine the promising practices which a secondary school principal might use to implement the process of mainstreaming was conducted through interviews with 50 principals and a survey of books and articles published since 1970. The principals were asked to state five to ten promising practices they would recommend and their responses were compared to recommended practices set forth in the literature. There was general agreement between the literature and the principal's responses. The ten most often recommended practices included the following suggestions: the principal provides leadership in planning for mainstreaming within his school, the principal informs all the school faculty members of the process of mainstreaming as it is to be implemented in his particular building, and the teachers should be motivated to study and learn the process. (BD)

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ED161189

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Promising Practices in Mainstreaming for the Secondary School Principal

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by

E. Dale Davis

Southern Methodist University

EC 11423/7

Promising Practices for the Secondary

School Principal in Mainstreaming

The term "mainstreaming" refers to the integration of students with special needs into the regular classroom. Although specific mainstreaming programs may differ widely, their purpose is similar: to provide each special-needs student with effective, appropriate instruction without depriving him of the social and personal benefits of the regular classroom. Mainstreaming involves focusing on a student's specific needs and abilities rather than on descriptive labels such as "learning disabled", "dyslexic", or "mentally retarded". And it involves the cooperation of a wide range of educators--diagnosticians, special-education teachers, classroom teachers, and school administrators--so that each student receives full educational opportunity.

The success of any mainstreaming program depends on adequate preparation of those most directly involved with its implementation--the school principal and classroom teachers. When confronted with the challenge of integrating special-needs students into classrooms, many principals and teachers express concern, anxiety, or even resistance. It

is essential, then, that they acquire the information and administrative support they need to implement the program successfully.

The purpose of this study was to determine the promising practices which a secondary school principal might employ as he attempts to implement the process of mainstreaming in his school. The promising practices which are outlined below are the results of a study of books and articles published since 1970 and on-site interviews with fifty secondary school principals working in the states of Maryland, California, Texas, North Carolina, and Georgia in schools where the process of mainstreaming was already underway. The principals were simply asked to state five to ten promising practices they would recommend to other principals who were starting the process of mainstreaming in their schools. Their responses were then compared to recommended practices set forth in the literature. There was general agreement between the literature and the principal's responses.

Recurring Questions Concerning Mainstreaming

Before the promising practices are set forth, it seems appropriate to this author to answer several questions which were often demanding clarification in the interviews with principals and, indeed, in some of the articles reviewed.

First, what is meant by "Mainstreaming"? The term "mainstreaming" has been used frequently and in different ways during the last few years. Along with its varied meanings has come confusion regarding what the word really means. While there may not be a definition that is universally agreed on, there are some basic themes that can be looked to for an understanding of the intent of mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is --

--providing the most appropriate education for each child in the least restrictive setting.

--looking at the educational needs of children instead of clinical or diagnostic labels such as mentally handicapped, learning disabled, physically handicapped, hearing impaired, or gifted.

--uniting the skills of general education and special education so that all children may have equal educational opportunity.

Mainstreaming is not--

--wholesale return of all exceptional children in special classes to regular classes.

--permitting children with special needs to remain in regular classrooms without the support services they need.

--ignoring the need of some children for a more specialized program than can be provided in the general education program.

--less costly than serving children in special self-contained classrooms.

A second question which needs clarification is what is meant by the term least restrictive alternative? In mainstreaming, program and service alternatives are supposed to be based on the principles of the least restrictive alternative. To the maximum extent possible, children shall be educated in regular class settings. When the regular class

environment does not prove satisfactory in meeting the needs of the children, consultant or supportive services, remedial or advanced instruction and/or special instructional materials should be provided prior to removing them from the regular classroom. Whenever possible, problems in learning and normal functioning of children requiring special services should be overcome in the regular classroom rather than in a separate program or school. Special classes, separate schools or removal of children requiring special education from the regular educational environment should occur only when their needs are such that education in regular classes, even with the use of supplementary aids and services, cannot be accomplished satisfactorily. Some of these principles stem from the legal basis for mainstreaming.

Another question is what is the legal basis for mainstreaming and the least restrictive alternative? Public Law 94-142, The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (signed by President Ford on November 28, 1975) makes a number of critical stipulations which must be adhered to by

both the state and its localities. These stipulations include the following:

--assurance of extensive child identification procedures;

--assurance of a "full service" goal and detailed timetable;

--a guarantee of complete due process procedures;

--the assurance of regular parent or guardian consultation

--maintenance of programs and procedures for comprehensive personnel development;

--assurance of special education being provided to all handicapped children in the "least restrictive" environment;

--a guarantee of policies and procedures to protect the confidentiality of data and personal information;

--assurance of nondiscriminatory testing and evaluation;

--assurance of the maintenance of an individualized program for all handicapped children;

--assurance of an effective policy guaranteeing the right of all handicapped children to a free, appropriate public education, at no cost to parents or guardians.

It is most important for secondary school principals to observe that an official, written document containing all of these assurances is now required of every school district receiving federal entitlement funds. It should also be pointed out that during recent years the various states have passed legislation which provides for the implementation of mainstreaming. On July 8, 1977, the Texas State Board of Education approved a regulation which stated that to be certified to teach on the elementary or secondary level, a person should have knowledge and skills relating to the education of exceptional/handicapped pupils incorporated with the framework of existing programs for elementary and secondary teachers, including the following:

1. Knowledge of the concept of least restrictive alternatives and its implications for the instructional process;

2. Knowledge of the characteristics and learning differences of exceptional/handicapped pupils;

3. Skills in informal assessment and a variety of instructional techniques and procedures for implementing the educational plan for exceptional/handicapped pupils; and

4. Knowledge of the admission, review, and dismissal processes and understanding of the individualized educational programs for exceptional/handicapped pupils.

Promising Practices

The author found the promising practices set forth in the literature as recommendations to be essentially the ones which were also most often stated by the school principals. The ten most often recommended practices are stated below:

1. The principal provides leadership in planning for mainstreaming within his school. Most of the sources studied and all of the principals interviewed agreed that the place where the practical implementation of

mainstreaming begins is the principal's office. All sources agreed that planning for mainstreaming must begin in the individual school building. The person in charge there, of course, is the school principal. His leadership and support of the concept and importance of mainstreaming in its implementation are essential.

2. The principal informs all the school faculty members of the process of mainstreaming as it is to be implemented in his particular building. An outside person is not to do this. The principal, working with his faculty, should arrange for one large block of uninterrupted time for this first phase of the introduction to mainstreaming. This, of course, assumes that the principal has informed himself on the subject and that he is working within a plan drawn up by the local school district. This large block of time, which may involve three or four hours, should be part of the in-service program of the school.

3. The teachers should be motivated to study and and learn the process. This is best done, according

to the literature and the principals interviewed, if the principal is in the position to offer tangible reinforcement for faculty efforts. This may take the form of released time, salary increments, support for attending a conference, or other possibilities for rewarding a faculty member for his professional efforts.

4. Another promising practice is for the principal to assess faculty resources and attitudes toward participation in mainstreaming. Usually he will want some outside help in this matter. The faculty should understand that ultimately the mainstreaming program will affect the entire faculty and school program. The principal should make clear what is involved in mainstreaming, and he should determine what the needs of his faculty are.

5. The principal must know and understand state and federal law and regulations. He must also thoroughly understand local school board policy regarding the educational placement of handicapped students. A wealth of information on this topic can now be obtained

from the Division of Exceptional Children in the Texas Education Agency. Of course, the principal should share this information with his faculty.

6. Principals must create an atmosphere that promotes positive social adjustment of mainstreamed handicapped students and their nonhandicapped classmates. Mainstreaming requires social readjustment for all students, and the principal's awareness and demonstration of interest can both influence other educators to share similar priorities and values and be a strong message to students, handicapped and nonhandicapped, that social adjustment is recognized as being educationally significant and that pupils have social responsibilities to each other and to themselves.

7. The principal will find it necessary by law and a promising practice in policy to form a placement team to see that students are properly evaluated and placed. A placement team is a group of people responsible for obtaining child evaluation information, determining eligibility for special education services, developing individual educational plans, recommending educational

placement, monitoring and evaluating the continuing appropriateness of team decisions. This decision-making team will most likely include a psychologist, counselor, social worker, nurse, teachers, principal or some other administrator, and a parent.

8. It is important for the principal to demonstrate the application of individualization as well as to endorse it philosophically. Because of his position, the principal's endorsement of the importance of individualization has much promise and value. As he displays respect for the differences among faculty and students, the concept of individuality can become a way of thinking in a school. Mainstreaming demands that the curriculum be tailored to the special strengths and weaknesses of students. Most teachers have not been educated to the very tough demands of individualization in the area of mainstreaming; so when they work diligently in this effort, principals must acknowledge their efforts by praising and encouraging them. Most educators usually receive minimal praise for their successes; yet their failures are quickly recognized.

Public law 94-142 and state laws require an individual education plan for students. This is a written statement describing the educational objectives for the services to be provided to each handicapped child, including both instruction and related services. Principals can establish individualization as a priority in the school as they accept responsibility for advocating its importance, acting upon the philosophy, and rewarding teachers, in so far as possible, for doing likewise.

9. Still another promising and necessary practice for principals is in the area of helping to provide the necessary resources for faculty members to make individualized instruction possible. The principal, with the approval of the district's central administrative offices, can employ staff with special training, purchase commercial materials, or identify means of providing in-service training to the faculty. He should work to identify resources in the community both within the school and outside the system, and he should underscore the importance of shared responsibility for individualization.

10. A final promising practice, which is also a requirement of the law, is the establishment by the principal of the priority of parent involvement and the attitude that will form the basis of school-parent interactions. The principals interviewed and the literature studied by this writer indicated that the key factor in developing constructive interactions with parents often is the attitude that parents are partners and, hence, are worthy of respect. The principal must play the major role in communicating this message to the faculty. The best way to communicate this message is by actually demonstrating these attitudes at school in contacts with parents by setting aside time to share information with them, showing willingness to work on special problems, following through on suggestions from parents, and respecting the viewpoint of parents when it is different from that held by school personnel.

It is important to remember that since principals are ultimately responsible for carrying out school board policy, they must make sure that parent consent

is obtained for all major tests, other aspects of assessment, and for placement in special programs. At the beginning of the school year the principal and his faculty should develop guidelines to provide for in-depth involvement of parents in mainstreaming.

Principals also need to secure parent involvement in the process of individualization. Parents can often provide valuable help and information concerning particular needs of the handicapped, and they can set forth any special concerns or questions which they might have. Educators have for years acknowledged the importance of individualized programs for students. Mainstreaming does demand that parents are also treated as individuals. The principals who are aware of and respect parental differences will lay a solid foundation for parental involvement.